

to step in to provide some assistance and help when the United States ought to be doing something, at least allowing people to step in to make a difference in the lives of these people?

These are modest steps that allow the greatness and the generosity of the American people to shine through without political or ideological filters. I can think of no better way of giving the Cuban people a message of hope that we stand with them. We disagree with their Government and their Government policies, and we are not likely to change that anytime soon. But we care about them and what happens to their families and their children. In a natural disaster, the worst in 50 years, an island country 90 miles off our shore, we ought to be able to do a better job than sit here and lecture about geopolitics and allow them to go through this suffering without allowing people to help others to get back on their feet again.

The intent of this amendment has broad support. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops wrote:

In light of the devastation and humanitarian disaster caused by recent hurricanes in Cuba and the efforts of extended families, friends and organizations to reach those in need, I urge you, [President Bush] to suspend—even temporarily—Treasury and Commerce Department restrictions and licensing requirements for humanitarian travel and remittances by American citizens and assistance by not-for-profit organizations. At times of crisis, there are simple and basic acts of charity on which people rely.

The Catholic bishops and numerous NGOs are right, and we know it, and I think we should help.

To those who think that refusing to help will somehow serve our U.S. national interests, I make just two observations. We need to be honest with ourselves: To be seen as wanting the Cuban people to suffer and starve—while we rush to the aid of their Caribbean neighbors—is not going to contribute to our common goal of promoting a peaceful, democratic transition, which Cuba desperately needs and deserves, and good relations between our countries in the future.

Moreover, as we stand on the sidelines, other countries are more than willing to fill that vacuum. As I mentioned a moment ago, President Chavez of Venezuela has been most generous, according to press reports. Russia has sent four cargo planes with tons of emergency supplies and construction materials. China has provided over \$300,000. Spain has already sent plane loads of relief supplies. Brazil, Argentina, and Mexico are offering assistance without political restrictions.

Senator LUGAR and I believe this is a moment in which we ought to set aside—at least for 180 days—our differences to a nation of people who are less than 100 miles off our shore, who have family members—many courageous people who live in this country and who want to do something to help their family members and friends as they go through recovering from these

terrible storms that have ravaged their nation. At the appropriate time, Senator LUGAR and I wish to offer this amendment and urge our colleagues, whatever other differences we may have had and will have on Cuban policy, this is a moment when we all ought to come together to step up and make a difference in the lives of people who, frankly, could use the help.

I yield the floor and note the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SANDERS. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. STABENOW). Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### THE ECONOMY

Mr. SANDERS. Madam President, honest people may have differences of opinion as to what type of public policies to pursue to improve our economy, but there should not be a difference of opinion in terms of the state of the economy today, whether it is in Michigan, your State, whether Vermont, my State, or any of the other 48 States. The fact is that for tens and tens of millions of working families in this country, people are having and experiencing great difficulty. And within that context and the context of the Wall Street Journal reporting that today was a day when America's financial system was shaken to its core, and the Dow Jones average went down by some 500 points, I found it rather stunning, if I may use that word, to hear Senator MCCAIN state that "the fundamentals of our economy are strong." In saying that he is simply echoing what President Bush has been saying year after year after year, despite all of the evidence to the contrary. One does try to get a handle on understanding what world Senator MCCAIN and President Bush are living in when they would suggest that "the fundamentals of our economy are strong." Clearly, they have not been talking to working families around the United States of America.

My perception of the economy is if you get off of the country club circuit, you stop talking to the millionaires and the billionaires and the large campaign contributors, and you talk to ordinary working people, people who own small businesses, what you find, in fact, is that the middle class in our country is under more assault than has been the case since before the Great Depression.

The reality of American life today is that poverty is increasing. Over 5 million Americans have slipped out of the middle class into poverty. What we have all over America is families where mom and dad are both working and are now lining up outside emergency food shelves because the limited income they are earning is not providing enough money to provide the food they

and their kids need. That does not suggest to me that the fundamentals of our economy are strong.

Since President Bush has been in office, over 7 million Americans have lost their health insurance, and the cost of health insurance has soared. Approximately 20,000 Americans die every single year because they can't gain access to medical care, to primary health care. We spend twice as much per capita on health care as any other nation, yet we are the only nation in the industrialized world that does not provide, by law, health care to all of its people. That does not suggest to me that "the fundamentals of our economy are strong."

Health care is perhaps the most basic need, maybe outside of food, outside of shelter, that people have, and 46 million Americans are without health insurance. I don't quite understand how Senator MCCAIN believes in that regard that "the fundamentals of our economy are strong."

Since President Bush has been in office, median income for working-age Americans has gone down by over \$2,000 after adjusting for inflation. Family income is going down. People are spending more for food. The cost of gas, of course, is now off the wall. College education costs are up. How does that sound like a situation in which "the fundamentals of our economy are strong," according to Senator MCCAIN.

I think the confusion in all of this is pretty easily understood. The truth is "the fundamentals of our economy are strong" if you are within the top 1 percent of our country. If you are a millionaire or billionaire, you know what, Senator MCCAIN is right; the fundamentals of the economy are strong for those people.

If you are one of the 400 wealthiest people in our country, you collectively own \$1.4 trillion of America—400 families, and your wealth has exploded in the last 8 years. In fact, in America today, the top one-tenth of 1 percent earn more income than do the bottom 50 percent. Within that context, certainly, if you are among the top one-tenth of 1 percent, we can understand why Senator MCCAIN would suggest that "the fundamentals of our economy are strong."

What frightens me is that anyone who is so removed from the economic reality facing the American people clearly is not going to have a prescription on how to address the real problems facing ordinary Americans. If your diagnosis is wrong, if you are a physician and you make an incorrect diagnosis, your treatment is not going to work very well. If you are President of the United States, whether it is Bush or something that MCCAIN aspires to, clearly your actions are not going to be effective if you do not understand what is going on.

Let me, if I might, contrast what has been going on under President Bush compared to what was going on under President Clinton. I am not here to tell